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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000351

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL:12/16/2012

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: OULD ABDALLAH ON COTE D'IVOIRE

Ref: Abidjan 271

- USUN 314

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER. REASON 1.5(d).

11. (C) Summary: Amadou Ould-Abdallah February 6 told Ambassador Jeter that several factors had engendered the post-Marcoussis disarray. Ould-Abdallah thought Kufuor would be more effective as ECOWAS Chairman than Wade had been. The French had leverage but were losing a little every day by failing to use it. Ould-Abdallah said Albert Tevoedjre's appointment was a positive step but felt the Beninois relied too heavily on prayer rather than diplomacy. Nigeria could and should play a useful role, but Gbagbo's prevarications early on had discouraged them. End Summary.

12. (C) Over breakfast at the Ambassador's Residence on February 6, UN West Africa Special Representative Amadou Ould-Abdallah told Ambassador Jeter that he had been spending a disproportionate share of his time on Cote d'Ivoire. He thought the appointment of Benin's Albert Tevoedjre would allow him more time for other issues, such as advancing implementation of the ICJ ruling on the Nigeria-Cameroon border dispute (septel). Ould-Abdallah called Tevoedjre experienced and learned but commented that the Beninois sometimes put too much faith in the power of prayer to bring antagonists together.

13. (C) Ould-Abdallah thought Ghana's John Kufuor would be a more effective ECOWAS Chairman than Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade had been. Kufuor "speaks frankly, but he is friendly and not lecturing." While Wade had a strong sense of the issues at play in Cote d'Ivoire, he presumed too much as a result of his title as ECOWAS Chairman, signing letters in that capacity without having first thoroughly vetted them with his colleagues, for example. But his heart was in the right place, and he sought a just outcome. Ould-Abdallah was less sure of Eyadema's motivations.

14. (C) Ould-Abdallah sharply criticized Eyadema's efforts to undermine Wade. The Ivorian had wanted international mediation "to become African under Eyadema." This was a "very cheap" ploy that had been intended to "play African against African." Ould-Abdallah thought that Kufuor's accession to the ECOWAS Chairmanship would eventually reduce Eyadema's role as Gbagbo had more confidence and trust in Kufuor than in Wade.

15. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question, Ould-Abdallah contended that Gbagbo and others had not focused on the implications of the rebels' request for the Defense and Interior Ministries. "Bedie and Gbagbo wanted the money portfolios - Agriculture, Finance and Works," Ould-Abdallah said. He conceded that the rebels' alacrity in telling the media of their coup had aggravated the problem but was not the decisive issue. "Anyway, the demonstrations [by Gbagbo backers] were not really spontaneous; we have reason to think he (Gbagbo) encouraged them" (see also ref A). There was also the problem of those who rebelled against lawful authority in essence now becoming that authority over the heads of those who had fought to uphold it, as well as personality issues associated with Guillaume Soro and Louis-Andre Dakourey. Finally, Gbagbo's wife, a power in Parliament herself, was taking a hard line.

16. (C) Was there a role for Ouattara?, the Ambassador asked. Ould-Abdallah responded with sharp criticism of Ouattara for his failure to "bring people on board" after his electoral victory. Ouattara had scarcely lived in Africa and was "too much an international civil servant" to identify effectively with the Ivorian people. However, the GOCI and its political allies had "so demonized" Ouattara that he was now a symbol of northern resistance.

17. (C) Ambassador Jeter regretted that contention at the highest levels of Ivorian politics, and between Togo and

Senegal had precluded a quick success for ECOWAS efforts. Ould-Abdallah opined that in circumstances that come close to civil war, those who can inspire fear and those who can offer something to meet a need have leverage. The French, he said, have leverage on both scores but are unable to use it effectively. As a result, their leverage is slowly being attenuated. The Nigerians were the first to come to Gbagbo's assistance, but he lied to them, so Obasanjo effectively withdrew from the fray. Ould-Abdallah was pleased to see Abuja slowly re-engaging: Nigeria could and should play a continuing diplomatic role; it would be difficult to find a durable solution without Nigerian participation.

18. (C) COMMENT: We concur in Ould-Abdallah's assessment of the need for strong Nigerian engagement on the Cote d'Ivoire, and we have done what we can to promote stronger and more persistent Nigerian diplomatic engagement. Obasanjo and others in the GON now seem to be paying close attention to Cote d'Ivoire. Gbagbo may be more comfortable with Kufuor as ECOWAS Chairman than he was with Wade in that role. That fact too may facilitate mediation. However, alone among ECOWAS states, Nigeria possesses the military muscle and political weight to apply real pressure to recalcitrant players.
JETER